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TCBWorks: USING A WEB-GROUPWARE SYSTEM FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH

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Within two years, virtually every networked computer in the world will have Web access as part of its desktop. Web access to the Internet and internal corporate intranets will become a standard application, part of the operating system itself. As such, the Web offers a ubiquitous platform to support communication (Fellers, Clifton, and Handley 1995). There are now dozens of web-based systems available that bring the power of groupware to any desktop with a web browser (Collaborative Strategies 1996; Groupware Central 1996; Woolley 1996).

Our goal in this session is to introduce TCBWorks (<http://tcbworks.mgmt.uga.edu:8080>), a first generation Web-based groupware system. In this session, we will demonstrate the system and discuss how we and others have used it in our teaching, research, and departmental decision making.

TCBWorks is a set of groupware tools designed to enable people to interact, discuss issues, and make decisions using the Web. It supports structured discussions and multicriteria decision making for both same-place-same-time and any-place-any-time interaction. TCBWorks requires a UNIX (or linux) web server, but is platform independent at the client end; users can use Netscape or any compatible browser. TCBWorks is available free of charge to educational institutions.

The principal organizing object in TCBWorks is the project. A project contains all of the data and processes needed to perform most group tasks. Projects are organized in a hierarchy, so that projects can contain sub-projects, sub-sub-projects, and so on. Projects can be added, deleted, modified, and moved, among other functions. Every project has an organizer who selects which users can participate, what actions they can perform (e.g., add, delete, modify), and whether discussions will be anonymous or not.

Each project contains a set of topics that are also organized in a hierarchy and can be added, deleted, modified, and moved, etc. Each topic can be rated (i.e., voted on) using up to ten criteria. Topics in turn contain comments (short paragraphs of text) that can be added, deleted, and modified. Comments can contain HTML tags, enabling participants to specify formatting (e.g., bold, bullet lists, tables), imbed graphics, or provide a link to other web documents.

TCBWorks is currently in use by more than 200 organizations around the world. Most are headquartered in North America, followed (in order) by Europe, Australia-New Zealand, Asia, South America, and Africa. TCBWorks was designed to be used by people working in different places and times across the Internet and many organizations are using it for exactly this. However, more than half the organizations are also using it in intranets — local area or campus area networks closed to external users. The most common use is to support different time and place discussions within a campus or corporate office park, but TCBWorks is also used to support same time and place meetings in decision rooms.

REFERENCES

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